1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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and Kalafrana have also been centres of inward movement, and moreover have a higher than average proportion of skilled labour associated with Naval stations. The last region, that of suburban Malta stretching from Tarxien to St. Andrew's, is an area of transit to some extent, an area of urban and relatively mobile life, and as such is the type of region from which on *a priori* grounds one would expect high rates of exodus.

In some ways more noteworthy, and of particular direct interest in association with other of our findings, is the relative immobility in Central Malta, that belt of country stretching from Fomm ir-Rieh, across the Mdina-Rabat Uplands, across the long-settled good farmlands of the Central Region eastwards to St. Thomas' Bay. In this heart of old rural Malta, least directly affected by the changes characteristic of the last four centuries, the extreme course of emigration makes the least appeal.

POPULATION INCREASE IN RELATION TO RESOURCES

Between 1842 and 1905 the population of the Islands increased by 86,000 from 113,864. By 1947 it had grown by a further 100,000, an increase of 50 per cent. in 42 years. During the last decade the rate of increase has considerably diminished.

Behind this bare statement lie a number of important facts. We know that the rate of increase before the date of the first census was very high, extremely so when we remember the incidence of disease and corsair raids. As noted on p. 136 the rate of increase in the island of Malta during the rule of the Order was greater than that of Gozo during the last century. Moreover, it is probable that for some three or four centuries previous to the arrival of the Knights the rate of increase was comparable to those of the later periods.

It seems likely, therefore, that for perhaps 800 years, the Maltese population has increased at a fairly consistent and high rate up to 1947 (see too Section IV). It also seems probable that net emigration, although regionally variable, did little to relieve the steadily growing pressure on resource. We know, for instance, that of the total loss by migration of 67,000 between 1842 and 1956, 43,000 left after 14 '8. We also know that crude mortality rates dropped but slowly before 1943 and that infantile death rates declined markedly only after this decade. There is therefore no obvious vital revolution, no sudden upsurge in numbers, no simple formula, to be invoked in the explanation of the growth in Malta's population.

From a consideration of the demographic history of the Islands, in terms of political, economic and cultural changes and against the background of the landscape palimpsest, one is forced to strange conclusions, viz. that the concepts of 'over-population' or 'optimum population' have no historically valid meaning in a Maltese context. As we have seen in earlier chapters, there has always been considerable Island contact with neighbouring lands. During the period for which we have any historical record a great part of the wealth on which Malta has lived has come from outside. The historical sequence of population growth appears in Micawberish terms: something has always turned up, either a new external valuation or a new possibility of marginally increasing resource wealth, in time to prevent real 'over-population' appearing. This hypothesis is considered more fully in the concluding section but it is worth noting here that each historical conquest has *ipso facto* been made by an increasingly world-conscious power, by a more enterprising society, and each has led to the creation of wider opportunities for the gaining of wealth. Similarly, each intervening period of doldrums has been marked by improved ability to intensify the exploitation of internal resource, generally in the agricultural sector. Thus, in the eighteenth century the cotton boom, in the mid-nineteenth century livestock improvement and land reclamation, in the twentieth century modernised irrigation and dairy-farming, and more recently horticulture and the search for oil.

Up to the present time fortune has smiled and there has been no fall in living standards as might be expected in consequence of extreme over-population. Yet, during historical times at least, the population has always been too great for self-sufficiency and in this sense has always been over-large. The rather

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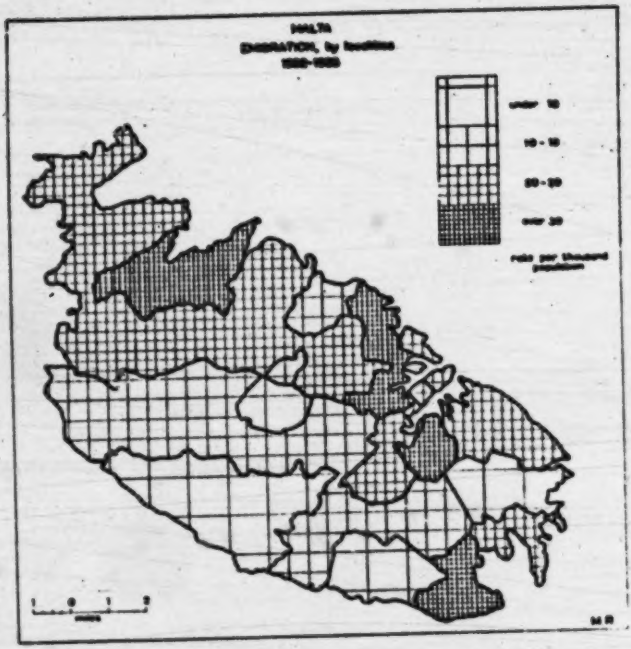

Fig. 63 Emigration by Localities, 1952-55.

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168 puzzled note made by the Royal Commissioners of 1911 would seem to be applicable to the whole of our period: 'We cannot but conclude that the Maltese people as a whole are by no means a destitute population seeing that they continue to absorb and pay for imports of considerable value over and above those which may be said to be paid for by the exportation of the products of the Islands' (30).

The obvious question of whether this process has now reached its limit is bound up with our analysis of the contemporary situation. For a decade or so, there has been a substantial overspill of population in emigration and the birth rate has declined (p. 153). The present apparent equilibrium is however most unstable. The rate of emigration itself is only to a limited extent controlled by economic forces and is bound to fluctuate. If the 1948-56 rate of natural increase were maintained and emigration discontinued, the total population of the Islands would leap up another 100,000 over the 1947 level to 400,000 by 1968. Moreover and as noted on p. 157 the nuptial fertility rates reveal that the rate of natural increase could rise even higher than at present if the indirect effects of emigration disappeared. To what circumstances can the concept of a population optimum be referred? Quite obviously the term has no relevance either to the known past or hypothetical future in that historical experience has so conditioned Maltese attitudes the even now there seems general confidence that a continued population inflation can be maintained.

168 Demographically considered these are facts of observation; socially and economically they are the factual basis on which future policies must be based.

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Our consideration must be restricted to the self-imposed terms of reference laid out in the introduction, an examination of the resources of the Islands and their utilisation, bearing in mind the decreasing likelihood of there occurring more falls of manna.

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